World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

PROGRAMME: No. 700, recorded 27 February 1998

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WORLD POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Long-range projections for the world population growth to the year 2150 depends on a number of fertility and mortality scenarios. Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, discusses these different scenarios as well as the economic, social and environmental impact of the projected increases on our planet earth and human societies.

WORLD CHRONICLE is produced by the Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.

Duration:	28:00"
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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Today, the world population is about six billion. By the year 2050, it could exceed 11 billion and, in a worst case scenario, it could reach 27 billion by the year 2150. Most of this increase will be in Africa and several other parts of the world that are now categorized as less developed regions. What will be the impact of these numbers on our planet earth and human societies? What are our governments' plans for the long range future of the world population?

Our guest today is fully aware of the world population projections. He is Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Joining me to talk with Mr. Chamie are Thalif Deen of *Inter Press Service* and Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand*. Mr. Chamie welcome to **World Chronicle.**

Mr. Chamie, although we have spoken about 6 billion people on this earth, in fact, that number will probably reach, I think, until July 1, or thereabouts, 1999, but in readings of the documentation for this programme, I saw this horrendous number. If fertility rates were to stay constant at 1990-1995 levels for the next 155 years, the world in 2150 would need to support 296 billion persons, in other words, 290 billion more than you project for next year. How on earth is the world going to support 296 billion people.

CHAMIE: That's a very good question. The number is primarily for educational purposes. We do not really think that this number is a reasonable, possible scenario, but it does indicate the impact of compounding increase in the compounding growth. Similarly, when you open up an account – a savings account – if you start at 20 and retire at 65, you have a big bundle of money. But if you start at 60, 5 years does not make much of a difference. This number is extremely high and it's not sustainable nor is it desirable.

LITTLEJOHNS: So why did you trot it out?

CHAMIE: To show that the current trends are not sustainable. Something will have to done, there will have to be some adjustments, in order that the number does not actually hit even near at that number. In addition, as you indicated, the number is going to be accruing. The largest growth is in the developing world. So 95% of all the growth is occurring in those countries where they have very large populations or expect to do so in the next century.

LITTLEJOHNS: We're speaking – we spoke in the introduction about the 11 billion by the year 2050, which is not an awful long way away. Is that a pretty hard number?

CHAMIE: Actually the 11 billion is what we're anticipating for 2150. We have in

our 5.9 billion in the world, next year is going to be the 6 billion mark. By 2050, we're gonna be hitting around 9.5 and then, thereafter, it will continue growing and hit, in 2150, around 10.8 and we think by the year 2200 stabilizing around 11 - certainly under 11 billion. That is the medium fertility scenario.

LITTLEJOHNS: So what about this 27 billion by the year 2150 in the worst case scenario, how much of a risk is there in that?

CHAMIE: That's very interesting because the number we gave you or we think our medium scenario – fertility scenario – is around 11 billion – the high and the low which we put a range around the medium – it's very small difference. It's actually half a child above and half a child below replacement. So, instead of having around two children, you have 2.5 or you have 1.5. And simply by having a half child above replacement, you don't have 11 billion but you have 27 billion. If you have to have a child less, you're at 3.6 billion. These are certainly possible and should be considered and that's why it's important to think about the policies and programmes of today.

DEEN: Mr. Chamie, you talked of a rise in the population for the next decade or the next few years, you know. But fertility and mortality rates have been declining. And there is a view, articulated by some of the think-tanks in the United States, particularly the American Enterprise Institute and the Harvard Centre for Population and Development Studies, which said that there is no such thing as a population explosion. That the population explosion is fizzling. And they even say that there is a prospect of an emptier planet, which is creating its own set of problems. What is your reaction to this?

CHAMIE: Well, many of these people at these institutes and centres and universities we deal with very closely. In fact, they're using our numbers. The term 'population explosion' is unfortunate. The word 'explosion' is unfortunate. We prefer to say that there's gonna be rapid population growth even in the coming years. As you know, the most rapid population growth that we have recorded, unprecedentedly high, was in the late '60s. It was around 2%. When Neils Armstrong was stepping on the moon, that's when the world's population growth was the highest – 2%. It's been coming down since then. But the absolute increment did not peak until the late '80s. At around 89 million per year. What we have is we have a global decrease in mortality rates although there's some reversals and setbacks that's been going on for decades and centuries, in fact, in the developed world and more recently, in this century, for the developing world. Similarly, in this transition, fertility has been coming down. Fertility is coming down a great deal. However, even the most conservative thinkers on this matter have concluded that our numbers – that there will be sufficiently and significantly more growth in the coming decades – concur with that. The people you mentioned and their articles, we

read them, they are convinced that we'll have 6 billion, 7 and 8. After that, they are not convinced that they want to use the medium fertility scenario but they want to use the low fertility scenario. What's gonna happen in 50 years is uncertain. We project for almost 200 years. Weathermen only predict long term a month in advance. We have a good record ..

LITTLEJOHNS: But they are not very reliable, either.

CHAMIE: Well, they'll have to comment on that. But we're very reliable. In the early '50s our population division projected the world's population for the year 2000. We projected that time 6.2 billion – we're gonna be around 6.1 billion.

DEEN: So you still think there is a population problem despite the dropping for ...

CHAMIE: The population problem is not a single issue. That is multi-faceted. You have fertility, mortality, morbidity, migration, age structure, aging and so on. We will see rapid growth. The population growth of the world is not evenly distributed. It clumps together. South Asia, Africa – there's no rapid growth in Europe. There's nominal growth in North America. The most rapid growth going on now are in those countries that have the most severe development problems and that's the concern. If we're evenly distributed it would be a different matter. But it's not. In fact, Pakistan, for example, is growing at a very rapid rate. We project Pakistan to be the third largest country in the world by 2050, if its current rates continue. We see it displacing United States as the third largest country. And India will surpass China and become the largest country in the world.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about the country like Brazil. Is there gonna be fertility ....

CHAMIE: Brazil is showing a remarkable decrease in fertility. And that trend is very encouraging. Many of these countries such as Brazil and others were at very high levels - 5 or 6 children per woman. And these rates are coming down now. Now, it's below 3 – it's somewhere around 2.6, I believe, 2.7 for Brazil, and now we have to wait and see if it's gonna continue coming down. The most remarkable drop, of course, was for the biggest country in the world – China. China in the 1970's, people were talking about how could the country sustain it. Its rates now are below replacement. Chinese fertility rates are below 2 children per couple. The same in Korea, Singapore and many other countries. And this is what they're thinking about. Who knows what the future is going to be. You may have optimistic outlooks saying it's gonna come down even more rapidly. But we have a very good track record. We feel this is gonna grow past 6, 7, 8 and probably, by 2050, be close to 9. Thereafter, it depends on which scenario you're most confident in. And we feel that the 27 billion is possible and 3.6 is possible. But we think, most confidence is probably in the medium scenario.

LESSING: Mr. Chamie, you mentioned the mortality and that mortality could mean

that fewer children, fewer babies die, fewer mothers die, but it also means people live longer. Somewhere in your summary, you suggested that the biggest rise is going to be in the people who are over 60 and on some cases over 80. This poses all sorts of social questions, doesn't it? I mean, how do people take on board these numbers and then make social policy?

CHAMIE: Now, isn't the reason for development is to have people survive? We want to reduce mortality. We want people to be born and die in old age. We want them to live a full life with minimum risks that can be associated with infant, child and maternal mortality. This is what's been experienced in the developed world. Most of the deaths occur after age 60. We're going through a transition. The world is becoming grayer. Someone spoke recently of a baby boom. Someone coined a term a 'gravy boom' now. Because the older people are gonna become much more of a larger proportion of the world. And this is universal because as fertility comes down, the age structure changes. And I think this is a good step in the development process, because you're having people choose the number and spacing of their children, and you're having fewer infants dying and children dying and mothers dying in childbirth. And I think that is a development achievement that the world should be extremely happy with. In my view, that's one of humanity's greatest achievements.

LESSING: But taking that on board and, nevertheless, as the population gets older, its social needs change. If you have a population, I believe in Brazil for some years, you know, most people there were teenagers or in their early 20's. If you've got people who are 65, 75 and so on still alive, still healthy, your social life changes, does it not?

CHAMIE: Absolutely.

LESSING: Does a policy have to be taken – this had to be taken into account in policy.

CHAMIE: All the parliaments, congresses and various legislative bodies are facing this now. The changing structure is gonna have revolutionary impact on the society and the thinking about the policies relating to retirement, pensions, services and so on. Before, when we were younger, when we said nursery, we thought for children. Now, there are nursing homes for adults, for the elderly to take care of them, and so on. Our projections show that these changes is gonna be monumental. In fact, by 2150 we project that one out of every three people would be above 60. And the most rapidly are in Europe – Italy, Spain – are the most rapidly aging and they have enormous number of elderly people in that society and, accordingly, their laws and policies and programmes will have to change.

DEEN: Mr. Chamie, talking of Italy and Spain, I'm told the world's lowest fertility rates are in these two countries. Now, what are the reasons for these? Is it because of increasing female education or the failure of the Catholic church – for they are two Catholic

countries?

LITTLEJOHNS: The failure of the Catholic church – or in terms of birth control ...

DEEN: Yeah, right, in terms of birth control?

CHAMIE: It's an interesting question. Several decades ago, in the '50s and '60s the common wisdom was "Oh, Catholics have higher fertility because they're Catholics, of course". But now, the lowest, the gold medal for low fertility goes to Italy and Spain. Look at Italy - Catholic country, predominantly I would say, relatively homogenous in the sense of the language and the culture and religion, and so on. Why is the fertility so low? Well, 4-5 decades ago, they would have said it's high because of religious beliefs and perspectives. The reasons fertility go down are multiple and they're extremely pervasive. The decrease and the changes that occurred many, many centuries ago when the human populations moved from the agricultural rural areas to cities, it changes your form of life. That began a process that we're going through now – urbanization. That's extremely important. Another important progress has been the changing status of women, both in terms of their education and also in terms of their participation in all facets of society. In addition, mortality has come down. Therefore, you don't have to have as many births for your children to survive. In addition, you've had increasing literacy both for men and women. Lifestyles have changed. People are more concerned with their physical attributes and their appearance and what else they can do. Now, most couples are choosing to have 1, 2 or 3 children or sometimes none. The Italian women and Italian men are choosing to have both numbers of children and that's their choice. And that was recognized in Cairo – the principle of the Conference ...

LITTLEJOHNS: At the Conference – the Population Conference ...

CHAMIE: ... was recognized at the Cairo Conference and even at the Bucharest and Mexico City that couples and individuals have the right to choose the number and spacing of their children. And that's consistent with all of the major religions of the world. People can choose. Now, how you do that – that has been the issue.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

LESSING: Mr. Chamie, we've heard of these many fine sentiments and I wouldn't question for a moment about reducing poverty. But you're talking about population increases in the poorer parts of the world. So how, in a sense, can we help the people who are going to be – there are going to be more and more in Africa, more and more people in Asia. What sort of help do those countries and those populations need to bring them somewhere near a nice standard of living so they can indeed be born and live and grow old in a pleasant manner.

CHAMIE: This is a very major concern. It's been discussed in the Commission of

Population Development. It's been discussed in other functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, as well as the General Assembly. There's no simple answer. Poverty is a function of many, many factors. Population growth does not necessarily, in all cases, act as an impediment or as a factor that would bring about rapid development. There're so many circumstances. Currently, we have to help and assist countries with mortality. Universal consensus about lowering mortality, we have to bring down these rates since differentials in these countries. Thereafter, in the same time you have start providing them with food, nutrition and all the other basics that they need. Then you will start seeing rapid changes in their fertility rates, as well. And you see those now occurring in Africa, even in India. Take India. India's State of Kerala has very low fertility. And it was being able to achieve that at a relatively rapid rate at a lower level of income. So there are very promising examples that can be used. And I think, with efforts and progress and programmes that the United Nations and Member States are putting forward, I think there are some optimistic signs for reducing the poverty. But it's not guaranteed. We have to continue working very hard.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie, in your projections, what account have you taken of the effective climate change and what's the impact of these huge numbers that we've been banding about on the environment in the foreseeable future – or the unforeseeable future – when it comes to that?

CHAMIE: Yes, as we are mentioning the growth of the population, over 95% is occurring in the developing world. And, therefore, it's having a certain impact on the environment and natural resources, water supplies, and so on. And this is what the concern is primarily. We have not factored in global changes and the climate in our projections. But we can say the population growth will affect greatly available resources. It will put a tremendous pressure, for example, on water.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about devastating diseases like AIDS.

CHAMIE: Yes, as you know, the populations of the world now are becoming more inter-dependent. The populations cannot isolate themselves. Nations cannot isolate themselves. Germs, viruses do not respect national boarders. They do not respect sovereignty of nations. Therefore, we have to be working together in a global concert to deal with these diseases and these viruses and so on, and AIDS is a serious problem, it's an epidemic, pandemic and this is one concern that has been addressed at the recent Commission on Population Development.

DEEN: Mr. Chamie, one of the issues that came up before the Population Conference in Cairo was a question of over-population vs. over-consumption. There are a number of developing countries which argued, and probably rightly so, that the problem is not so much

world population -- the over-consumption in rich countries -- because a family of say, four in the United States may consume twice or thrice the amount of a family of ten in Bangladesh or India. How valid is this argument?

CHAMIE: The argument, I think, was confirmed, in many respects, by the theme of the Cairo Conference that was held in 1994. The theme was Population Sustained Economic Growth and Sustainable Development. If you have rapid economic growth, but you can't drink the water and you can't eat the food, how good of it is it to have a car? Many of the developed countries have recognized these and have policies now to start addressing the issue of impact on the environment and the society. I don't think that anyone will disagree that you have to take care of not only population growth but also the impact on the environment by certain types of economic growths, certain types of economic development, and the key here is being able to do it with some foresight and having enough time to adjust. You cannot change economies overnight. You cannot change lifestyles overnight. But with enough time, enough patience, you can make remarkable differences in people's lives. You could see, for example, in the Western Countries, smoking patterns have changed. Nutritional patterns have changed. People are conscious of these. This was not imposed. This was conscious decisions by individuals and couples to make these decisions.

LESSING: Is there any indication that countries are willing to give up a little bit of their sovereignty for these global questions or huge regional questions? We're taking about sustainable development, for example.

CHAMIE: I think there's no choice. The weather, clouds, rain, acid rain, pollutants don't respect these borders. People have to work together, governments were working together. They work together not only on issues relating to environment, they're working together with regard to international migration. When asylum seekers, migrants, refugees come to your border, cross your border, governments have to work together. That's another issue that points out that populations cannot be isolated from one another. We're all living together on a common planet and these problems are gonna affect everyone. The attitude, previously, that -- 'oh, my neighbour has a cold, that does not concern me' -- that, now, has been dispelled. If your neighbour or his children have a cold or some illness, it does affect you. And everyone is concerned about keeping the population as healthy as they can for everyone's benefit.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie, earlier on, you spoke about the fertility coming down in a number of countries and you cited the example of Italy and Spain but what about other countries? Why is fertility coming down in these countries? Particularly developing countries.

CHAMIE: There's a huge body of literature on why fertility comes down. But there

seem to be the same factors nearly everywhere. As I mentioned, urbanization has a profound impact. When people move to cities, they can't have large houses, they have apartments. And their lifestyle changes. Therefore, that is a factor that's come to our countries. Also, the changing status and role of women in society has been changing -- increased education, increased health. In addition, we've had programmes for family planning services, which have made it easier for people to be able to achieve their family desires.

DEEN: When you talk of population growth in developing countries, can you cite any developing countries where the population has gone down or is expected to go down in the next decade, for example.

CHAMIE: We have low replacement fertility in Korea. If you remember, back in the early '50s, the Korean population have relatively high fertility and its population is going down. You have other developing countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries, they are concerned with their labour force and the decrease in fertility. So, we do have some countries that are concerned with their populations going down and in fact in 1999, there will be a meeting in Korea to address policies and strategies in those countries that have below replacement fertility such as East Korea. At present, there's roughly 50 countries at or below replacement and this represents 44% of the world's population and I want to stress that China is among that group.

DEEN: You don't think that current economic crisis in Asia will have an impact on your prediction?

CHAMIE: Well, the economic crisis is an unusual phenomenon. Sometimes, it makes people decide not to have children. Other times it has a decision impact to choose to have children. And my thinking is, the decisions with regard to having children are so basic and fundamental that an economic crisis of a few years may have a temporal effect but not a long-term effect. Men and women decide on having 1, 2 or 3 children on many, many factors. Upturn on the economy or downturn does have an impact but not a profound impact.

LESSING: You look ahead a 150 years and you see perhaps 11 billion people, what's life going to be like?

CHAMIE: It's going to be difficult to say exactly what it's gonna be, but I can tell you which country is gonna be much larger, much more crowded. We have a pattern right now where we see Europe declining in population size. Unless there's a change in the policies regarding international migration, we're gonna see a graying, much grayer Europe, a much smaller Europe. Also, we're gonna see a much larger Africa, many more people, there can be strains and challenges ahead, there will be difficulties, probably in Southeast Asia because there's some of the most rapid growth going out there, and also among the societies, you're

gonna see, if the changes occur, the role of women and their impact to society be profoundly different in many institutional societies because they have more time. As you know, with two children, it's very different than having six children. And so, the women will be participating much more actively in the society and in the labour force and this will have a profound effect on their way of lives in homes, in communities are organized.

LESSING: So, there will be more women in decision making positions, you're suggesting?

CHAMIE: I'm sure, given the trend – greater numbers of women will be in decision making and also in those places, that make a difference – business, community service, government service and this will come about basically through education and changing demographic patterns.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie, I noticed in your report, you speak of Northern America rather than North America and apparently you're separating Canada and the United States, on the one hand, from Mexico, on the other. Why did you do that?

CHAMIE: One of the questions about classification that is always interesting is how you divide the world. I can give you answer, but let me first tell you, that if you speak to someone who has been educated in Europe and ask him how many continents there are, he'll say five, probably. He or she will say there's Europe and Asia, and there's Australia and Africa and then there are the Americas. If you asked someone raised in Canada or the United States, he'll say there are seven separating Northern America, South America. Our classifications are usually done geographically. We separated them because of the differences in the demographics and also the economic status and group Mexico with the other developing countries, south of the Rio Grande.

LITTLEJOHNS: I thought that they might have something to do with the fact that Mexico is a country which has an enormous and growing population and Mexico City is, in fact, I think, about the most populous city in the world. But these were not factors that entered into your projections.

CHAMIE: No, we did not classify them based on the Mexico City's size but we did try to classify them in order to give people groupings that would be meaningful. Many people want to know what's the population size of the developed countries, the population size of the developing countries, and Mexico was grouped with the developing countries although its transition has increased in now, as you know, it's a member of OECD.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Chamie, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of the United

Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

He was interviewed by Thalif Deen of *Inter Press Service* and Judy Lessing of *Radio New Zealand.*

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**